



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

Stitching together 250 years of America

By Devin Steele

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday in 2026, it is fitting to reflect on an industry that has been woven into the nation's story since its earliest days: the sewn products industry.

When Americans think about the nation's founding, they often picture statesmen, soldiers and battlefield victories. Less often remembered are the skilled craftspeople whose work helped build the young nation. Among them was Betsy Ross, the Philadelphia upholsterer and seamstress long associated with sewing the first American flag. Whether creating flags, uniforms, sails, tents or everyday clothing, generations of sewing professionals helped supply a growing nation and establish the foundation of American manufacturing.

Long before the United States became a global economic power, textile and apparel manufacturing helped fuel its growth. From the mills and sewing rooms that supplied clothing for settlers, soldiers and workers, to the factories that produced uniforms during times of war and consumer goods during times of prosperity, the sewn products industry has played a vital role in building America. Generations of skilled workers transformed raw materials into products that clothed families, supported communities and strengthened the nation's economy.

The story of American manufacturing is, in many ways, the story of the sewn products industry. Throughout the Industrial Revolution, the rise of domestic manufacturing helped create jobs, build towns and establish supply chains that became the backbone of American commerce. The invention of the sewing machine by pioneers such as Elias Howe and the innovations popularized by Isaac Singer transformed production and helped usher in a new era of manufacturing efficiency. Entrepreneurs such as Levi Strauss helped create durable workwear that supported miners, farmers and workers during America's westward expansion.

The contributions of sewing and textile workers can be found throughout American history. From the seamstresses who produced uniforms for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War to the workers who supplied military uniforms during the Civil War, World Wars I and II and modern conflicts, the sewn products industry has consistently supported those who served. Behind nearly every major chapter in American history are manufacturers and craftspeople whose products enabled soldiers, workers, explorers and families to do their jobs and live their lives.

During World War II, millions of Americans answered the call to support the war effort. While "Rosie the Riveter" became an enduring symbol of American manufacturing, thousands of textile and sewing workers also played critical roles producing uniforms, parachutes, tents, packs and countless other essential products. Their work helped equip Allied forces and demonstrated the remarkable manufacturing strength of the United States.

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More recently, the industry once again demonstrated its importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. As global supply chains faltered and shortages of personal protective equipment threatened healthcare workers and first responders, U.S. textile and sewn products manufacturers rapidly mobilized to meet the need. Companies – including many SEAMS members – retooled production lines, developed new products and worked around the clock to manufacture face masks, isolation gowns, protective apparel and other critical PPE. The response highlighted not only the industry's flexibility and innovation, but also the strategic importance of maintaining a strong domestic manufacturing base capable of responding when the nation needs it most.

The industry has also played a defining role in American innovation. Over time, sewn products manufacturing expanded far beyond apparel to include home furnishings, transportation interiors, medical products, military gear, industrial textiles and countless other products that touch everyday life. Few industries have had such a broad and lasting impact on the American economy.

Today, the industry continues to evolve. Advanced manufacturing technologies, automation, technical textiles, personal protective equipment and nearshoring initiatives are helping write the next chapter. While the products may have changed, the industry's commitment to innovation, quality and resilience remains as strong as ever.

SEAMS members have been at the center of that story. Nearly two dozen current SEAMS member companies can trace their roots to the 1800s, while many others have been serving customers for generations. Several of these legacy companies are spotlighted elsewhere in this month's newsletter through SEAMS Board Member Xochil Herrera's X-Files feature. These companies have endured wars, economic downturns, technological revolutions, global pandemics and dramatic shifts in global manufacturing while continuing to innovate and adapt. Their longevity reflects more than business success; it demonstrates the resilience, ingenuity and staying power of American manufacturing itself. From family-owned businesses that began before the turn of the 20th century to modern manufacturers embracing advanced technologies, SEAMS members represent a living connection between America's industrial heritage and its manufacturing future.

The companies that make up the SEAMS membership have helped produce everything from military uniforms and protective equipment to apparel, furniture, automotive components, industrial products and specialized technical textiles. You have supplied products for American consumers, supported the nation's defense and provided quality jobs in communities across the country. Your contributions are often behind the scenes, but your impact is visible everywhere.

As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, we also look ahead to another important milestone. In 2027, SEAMS will celebrate its 60th anniversary. Since 1967, SEAMS has served as the Voice of the U.S. Sewn Products Industry, bringing together brands,

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manufacturers, suppliers and service providers while championing domestic production, innovation and supply chain excellence.

The history of the sewn products industry is far more than a collection of dates and milestones. It is a story of entrepreneurs, innovators, skilled craftspeople and manufacturing communities that helped shape the nation. It is a story of resilience, adaptation and determination. Most importantly, it is a story that continues to be written every day by the companies and individuals who make up the SEAMS community.

As SEAMS approaches its 60th anniversary, the association is proud to represent companies whose collective history spans much of America's 250-year journey. From the seamstresses of the Revolutionary era and the legendary story of Betsy Ross to today's advanced manufacturers producing military gear, medical products, personal protective equipment and technical textiles, the sewn products industry has remained a constant thread throughout America's history.

As we honor the past, celebrate the present and prepare for the future, we recognize that the sewn products industry remains an essential thread in the fabric of America — one that has helped build the nation for nearly 250 years and will continue to do so for generations to come.

To all SEAMS members, thank you. Thank you for preserving an industry that has played such an important role in America's history. Thank you for the products you manufacture, the jobs you create, the communities you support and the innovation you bring to the marketplace. Whether your company was founded in the 1800s or just a few years ago, you are helping write the next chapter of this remarkable American story. We are proud to represent you, and we look forward to continuing that journey together. As America celebrates 250 years and SEAMS prepares to celebrate 60 years in 2027, we are proud to represent you and grateful for all that you do. Together, we will continue stitching together the future of American manufacturing.

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